**Live in Community**

 Small Group Study

**Volume Overview**

**Navigate Hardship**

The righteous person faces many troubles, but the Lord comes to the rescue each time. ([Psalm 34:19](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ps34.19))

*Life is hard, even for believers. We all know it or discover it soon enough. Life tests our patience, our hope, and our sense of God’s presence. But we are not left hopeless in our challenges. God’s presence is more certain than even our hardships. Still, there are times in life that we need to be reminded that He is present. It’s in hardships that we learn to recognize it. We also learn to depend on God, to wait, and to look forward to His rescue.*

**Session Overview**

**Acknowledge Dependence**

**Biblical Encounter:** Zechariah and Elizabeth’s Wait Is Over ([Luke 1:6–25](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk1.6-25), [57–66](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk1.57-66))

**Outcome:** Depend on God even in the face of hopelessness and delay.

*In this session, we’ll explore how to navigate waiting and depending on God, even when things seem hopeless. We’ll look at a Bible story about a couple that God considered righteous: a priest named Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth. Though devoted to God, this couple was unable to have children. Then God came through in a miraculous way. This story shows us that we should depend on God even when He seems slow to answer our prayers.*

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| ***You Will Need*** *• Uncooked spaghetti noodles, 10–20 noodles per team* *• Large marshmallows, five or more per team* *• Plastic bags, one per team* *• Smartphone with timer* *• Optional: Prizes for winning team members****Getting Ready*** *• Prepare team bags, each with 10–20 uncooked spaghetti noodles and five marshmallows.* • ***First time leading* Live *for Youth? Look here for the*** [**Facilitator Guide**](https://0b769b0ed3569ef9d18b-f88d8272f61086866d50d048b43ef630.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/sites/biblengagementproject/Listen_Facilitator_Guide.pdf)**.** |

*To access session content and videos from a computer, visit:* [***BibleEngagementProject.com/downloads***](https://bibleengagementproject.com/downloads)

**Engage**

**Welcome**

*Take this time to welcome everyone, introduce new students, learn names, and thank everyone for coming. Your friendliness here can create a comfort level that encourages student participation later.*

**Opening Prayer**

*Prayer thoughts: Pray that each student will understand that God can still work in the midst of their hopelessness. Ask that everyone present will leave with a greater sense of hope for their life. Pray for new friendships to be made. Pray that students would be open to God’s Word and today’s discussion.*

**Introduction**

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| **QUESTION**What is a dream vacation you hope to take one day? |

Those are great travel ideas! Hope fills us with the desire for these adventures to happen someday. We can hope for many things in our life. But what happens when hope starts to die because the things we wish for seem impossible?

We can start to lose hope in times when life gets hard, too. We love Jesus, but sometimes it can be challenging to believe that He will come through and help us. We can get frustrated, impatient, and even start to think about taking the situation into our own hands. Hope seems to be the last thing on our mind. Let’s see how being in this position can bring more awareness of how near God is to us. We might even say that, in these moments, we can encounter in special ways the One who gives us hope.

**Group Activity**

**Spaghetti and Marshmallow Tower**

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| ***You Will Need*** *• Uncooked spaghetti noodles, 10–20 noodles per team* *• Large marshmallows, five or more per team* *• Plastic bags, one per team* *• Smartphone with timer* *• Optional: Prizes for winning team members****Getting Ready*** *• Prepare team bags, each with 10–20 uncooked spaghetti noodles and five marshmallows.* |

Let’s do a fun activity together. We’ll divide into teams to build the tallest freestanding tower out of uncooked spaghetti noodles and marshmallows. Each team will have five minutes to build. But there’s one rule you must follow. Each person on your team must participate in some way. The winning team will be the one with the tallest freestanding tower if everyone helped. At the end of five minutes, I’ll judge who has the tallest noodle tower.

• *Create teams of two to four students, depending on your group’s size.*

• *Hand out the supplies to each team.*

• *Use the timer on your smartphone to time the teams for five minutes.*

• *When time is up, choose the tallest tower, and make sure everyone in that group participated before declaring the winner.*

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| **QUESTION**Why do you think it was important that every team member played a part in building the tower? |

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| **QUESTION**For those on the winning team, how did each member of your team participate in the challenge? |

I wanted you to rely on every person on your team. This required a level of trust in and dependency on each other to be able to complete the task. For some of you, your tower may have fallen, and you were left feeling defeated. Our Bible story is about a married couple who may have had similar feelings in one area of their life—only their story doesn’t include marshmallows. Let’s see how we can depend on God even when things seem to be falling apart. Let’s start with today’s video.

**Watch**

**Consider What the Bible Says**

*Ensure each student has access to a Bible, preferably the same version.*

Today, our Bible story is from the Book of Luke. Luke is one of the four Gospels in the Bible. The Gospels share the account of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. We’ll get to know a priest named Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, who were unable to have a baby. In Bible times, having children was an expectation for women. So, to be childless would have been very emotionally hard for Elizabeth. This family’s story will show how those who love and follow God can still face hopeless situations. Let’s see what we can learn from them.

**Zechariah and Elizabeth Served God Faithfully**

Read [Luke 1:6–10](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk1.6-10).

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| **QUESTION**How does the Bible describe Zechariah and Elizabeth? |

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| **QUESTION**What can we learn from Zechariah and how he continued to serve God even though he and his wife were childless? |

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| **QUESTION**Have you ever felt that you were doing your best to serve God, but it still seemed like He didn’t answer your prayers? Describe the situation. |

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| **QUESTION**Have you ever wondered or lost hope that God could even hear your prayers? |

Zechariah and Elizabeth had already been serving the Lord for many years. The Bible says that they were advanced in years, so imagine your grandparents in this story.

Sometimes, we may think that if God answers other people’s prayers before ours are answered, they must be closer to God than we are. Just one look at their social media account might show us a life that seems amazing and free of problems. In reality, everyone can face hardships. Unanswered prayers can happen to anyone. We all lose hope at times and can feel like God is not nearby. We can learn a lot from how Zechariah and Elizabeth handled their likely disappointment. Rather than give up on God, they kept serving Him.

**Did You Know?**

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| *The inability of a woman to have children, known as barrenness, was viewed harshly by many during Bible times. For the families dealing with this difficulty, the cultural view added more pain to an already painful situation. In many people’s eyes, infertility was incorrectly seen as an absolute sign of God’s disapproval, likely because of sin. Yet, of the eight women Scripture notes as unable to have children, God’s favor was displayed as He miraculously intervened in all but one of their situations.1* |

**Zechariah Encountered an Angel**

Read [Luke 1:11–18](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk1.11-18).

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| **QUESTION**What was Zechariah doing when he encountered the angel? |

Zechariah had been chosen to go and burn incense in the temple. This was his job, as well as his ministry to God. Other people who were also devoted to God were outside praying while he was in the temple. Imagine trying to pray for others, as Zechariah was doing, even though you may have doubts because God isn’t answering your own prayers.

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| **QUESTION**What did the angel tell Zechariah about the son that would be born to him and Elizabeth? |

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| **QUESTION**Why do you think Zechariah questioned what the angel was telling him? |

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| **QUESTION**Why do you think people make excuses on why God can’t or won’t do something in their lives, as Zechariah did in verse [18](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk1.18)? |

Zechariah’s encounter with an angel that day was completely unexpected—so much so that Zechariah was scared. The angel told him not to be afraid. The angel then told Zechariah that God had heard his prayer.

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| **QUESTION**Have you ever felt like God gave you a promise about something you’d been praying for? What happened? |

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| **QUESTION**Do you wish we heard God today like Zechariah did in this story? Why or why not? |

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| **QUESTION**How do you respond when you feel God is distant or not answering your prayers? |

Perhaps you’ve been asking God for something and have not yet received an answer from Him. Let’s read on to see what we can learn from this example.

**Zechariah and Elizabeth Experienced Hope**

Read [Luke 1:19–25](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk1.19-25).

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| **QUESTION**What thoughts must have been going through Zechariah’s mind? |

Zechariah was probably in shock. He was having a conversation with an angel sent from God and the angel had just told him that his wife, Elizabeth, would have a baby!

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| **QUESTION**Why do you think the angel chose to silence Zechariah? |

It’s not completely clear, but it appears as though Zechariah questioned whether or not he could trust what Gabriel had said. In the back of his mind, maybe he wondered, *Why now, God?* after he’d prayed for so long. It’s obvious from his response that he had given up on ever having a baby.

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| **QUESTION**What was Elizabeth’s response to discovering she was pregnant? |

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| **QUESTION**Why is it difficult for us to have hope in God when our prayers go unanswered? |

There are times in our life when we experience delayed answers to our prayers. There are things we have asked God for, and we haven’t seen Him answer—at least not like we want Him to. We may feel as if God has forgotten us. The reality is that God had not forgotten about Zechariah and Elizabeth, and He has not forgotten about us either. God was with them, and He is near us each day as well.

**Hope Was Contagious**

Read [Luke 1:57–66](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk1.57-66).

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| **QUESTION**What do you think Zechariah thought about while he couldn’t speak? |

We don’t know exactly how long it took from when the angel delivered the message until Elizabeth became pregnant. As a result, Zechariah may have been unable to speak for quite a while. Imagine God answering your prayer and then still having to wait even longer to see the answer come about. Zechariah saw and heard from an angel, and then his wife really did become pregnant. He experienced all this without being able to talk to anyone. He must have had a million thoughts running through his mind about the promises of God, why God had waited so long to answer, and other thoughts about the goodness of God.

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| **QUESTION**Do you think God answers every prayer from those who believe in Him? Explain. |

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| **QUESTION**Why do you think God sometimes delays the answer to our prayers? |

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| **QUESTION**What was the response of the people in verse [66](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk1.66)? |

Their neighbors and relatives rejoiced at the birth of Zechariah and Elizabeth’s son. For at least nine months, Zechariah and Elizabeth had thought about how special their baby would be and how God’s hand was on him. Even when we know God’s answer, we may still have to wait for it to happen.

What’s important for us to understand is that God wants to do so much more than simply answer our prayers. For example, our prayers can change not only us, but those around us. Delayed answers to our prayers can help others turn to God in ways that simply having our prayers answered right away cannot.

**Reflect**

**Depend on God even in the face of hopelessness and delay.**

An old couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth, were known for two things. First, this couple obeyed God. Second, they lived in a way that was right according to God. Yet they had lived many years with the personal pain and cultural condemnation for not having any children. In the midst of a situation that seemed hopeless, they continued to serve God.

Then Zechariah had an amazing encounter with an angel. The angel told him that God had been listening to his prayer for a child, and that his wife would become pregnant. Perhaps you have also waited and waited for God to come through and felt that He wasn’t listening. Then, in one unexpected moment, God gave Zechariah new hope. God can do the same in our lives, too.

**Listen to God**

Let’s take time to consider how our life demonstrates a real trust in the Bible. These questions are meant to serve as a conversation between you and God. Sharing your responses with the group is completely voluntary.

• *Pause for a few moments of silent reflection after reading the questions. Then ask students if they want to share. Sharing your personal response may also be helpful to the students.*

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| **QUESTION**Have you lost hope that something you’ve been asking God for will become a reality? |

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| **QUESTION**How has this story encouraged you to have hope and depend on God for answers to prayers? |

**Activate**

Break into groups of two or three. Take a moment to share with each other something you’ve been praying for but haven’t yet seen an answer. After everyone has shared, take a moment to pray for each other.

**Conclusion**

It’s easy to feel that God is far away from us when everything around us is not going right. We can feel so alone when life is hard. The reality is that God is always present and active in those who follow Him. Zechariah and Elizabeth showed us how you can stay faithful even when you don’t see God answer your prayers at the time you want.

At exactly the right time, this couple gave birth to John, who was later called John the Baptist. He was a special servant of God who prepared the way for Jesus. God had a bigger plan that included Zechariah and Elizabeth. God was up to much more than just the two of them simply having a baby. They would be parents to a prophet who would introduce Jesus to the people. And all that happened at exactly the right time. Sometimes what we consider a delay, or God not listening, is really God doing a miracle in His timing.

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| **Salvation Opportunity***Include this if you think there may be some in the group who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus.*We all have needs and things we desire. One of the greatest needs that we have is a longing to be loved. God desires to be in a relationship with you—to always love you, talk with you, and be there for you. He sent His Son Jesus so that it would be possible for everyone. No matter how much you may or may not know about God or what you have done, Jesus died so that you can know God and have a relationship with Him. There is no delay for those who ask Jesus to forgive their sins and invite Him into their life. God will answer right away.**Is anyone here that we can pray for who doesn’t have a relationship with Jesus or wants to renew their relationship with Him?***Take a moment to acknowledge those who respond, and thank them for their desire to make things right between themselves and God. Pray with them as you close in prayer or after the group time is over. Following group time, talk more about where they are in their walk with God and how you might be able to help.* |

**Prayer**

Father God, thank You for helping us know You and Your ways better. Help us to trust that You are never late in answering us, even when we lose hope. You are always close and present. Help our friends who are going through tough times to continue trusting You as well. Amen.

**Dismissal**

As we listen to what the Bible says, we will learn to live it out and trust God more. I’m so happy to hear about those of you who are going through the daily devotions during the week. These will help you with the discussion we had today. See you next time!